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Message Text

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12
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

SAJ-01 OMB-01 /068 W
---------- 078039
R 210810Z AUG 76
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7794
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 13237

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, XC, UR, CH, US
SUBJECT: THE SOVIETS AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: REPRISE

REF: (A) SINGAPORE 3801, (B) JAKARTA 10450, (C) RANGOON 2391,
(D) KUALA LUMPUR 4347, (E) MOSCOW 7247

THE WISDOM AND WIT OF THE COMMENTARY FROM OUR COLLEAGUES
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA (REFTELS) HAS AGAIN LIVENED UP A DULL
MOSCOW SUMMER AND PROVIDED A SHARPER FOCUS ON WHERE WE
AND OTHERS CURRENTLY STAND IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. AT THE RISK
OF REDUNDANCY AND OF REPEATING WHAT WE HAVE SAID PREVIOUSLY
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ON THIS SUBJECT, WE WOULD ADD A FEW FURTHER POINTS:

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-- THE REGION IS FAR FROM THE SOVIET HEARTLAND,
AND THUS OF RELATIVELY LOW PRIORITY IN SOVIET POLICY
FORMULATION. COMMENTING ON THE SOVIET REACTION TO THE
HANOI-ASEAN DIFFERENCES LAST FEBRUARY, MIKHAIL KAPITSA
JOKINGLY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT U.S. ANALYSTS TEND TO SEE A
GRAND DESIGN IN EVERY SOVIET UTTERANCE,
WHEREAS, IN FACT, "WE DON'T EVEN HAVE A POLICY IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA." THE POINT,WHILE OVERSTATED, WAS THAT
SOVIET POLICY SINCE THE FALL OF INDOCHINA HAS BEEN
SUBJECT TO CONFLICTING PRESSURES AND HAS TENDED TO
FOLLOW RATHER THAN TO LEAD;

-- MOSCOW'S PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS TO GAIN INFLUENCE,
OR AT LEAST TO LIMIT ITS POTENTIAL LOSSES, ESPECIALLY VIS-A-VIS
CHINA. BUT THE SOVIETS WOULD LIKE AT SOME POINT TO MOVE BEYOND
SIMPLY LIMITING LOSSES AND SUPPORTING HANOI TO A MORE
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES
OF THE REGION. THIS IS NEITHER SURPRISING NOR ALARMING
IN ITSELF. IT DOES MEAN (AS EMBASSY SINGAPORE POINTS OUT)
THAT THE SOVIETS WILL DO ALL THEY CAN TO
EXPAND THEIR PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE IN THE AREA. BUT
THEIR DEGREE OF SUCCESS WILL DEPEND ON HOW RESPONSIVE
THE ASIANS WHO LIVE THERE ARE, AND THE NATURE OF THE
REGION AS WELL AS THE CAUTIOUS REACTIONS THUS FAR
SUGGEST THAT THE ASIANS WILL NOT BE EASILY SEDUCED;

-- PRESENCE MAY NOT EQUATE WITH INFLUENCE,
BUT IT COMES CLOSE IN SOVIET EYES. THUS WE CAN EXPECT
MORE SOVIET AID OFFERS IN AN ATTEMPT TO FILL WHAT THEY
PERCEIVE TO BE THE VACUUM LEFT BEHIND BY THE U.S.
RETREAT. WE WILL ALSO SEE MORE SOVIET SHIP-DAYS IN
AND AROUND SEA AS SOVIET DEPLOYMENT CAPABILITY GROWS.
INTERESTS, IN THIS CASE, MAY WELL FOLLOW THE FLEET;

-- FURTHER, WHAT THE SOVIETS PERCEIVE AS A
U.S. SHIFT TO THE ISLANDS AND THE HIGH SEAS WILL CALL
FORTH A COMPETITIVE REACTION FROM THE SOVIETS. THEIR
MOVES IN RECENT MONTHS TO ESTABLISH RELATIONS AND TO
SEEK FACILITIES IN THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC ARE A PART OF
THIS COMPETITION.

-- THE UNCHARACTERISTIC SOVIET "LIGHTHANDEDNESS"
IN BURMA AND THE PROXY BENEFITS MOSCOW HAS GAINED BY
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HANOI'S IMPROVED TIES IN THE REGION ARE AMONG THE
GROWING SIGNS OF SOVIET SUBTLETY IN DEALING WITH THE
REGION. THIS SUBTLETY WILL INCREASE OVER THE YEARS AS
A NEW GENERATION OF WELL-TRAINED LANGUAGE OFFICERS
TAKES OVER SOVIET POLICY TOWARD THE AREA.

-- THE SOVIETS ARE PLEASED WITH THE POST-
VIETNAM SCENE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE REGION POSES NO
THREAT TO IMPORTANT SOVIET INTERESTS, AND CHINA HAS

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NOT GAINED MEASURABLY. YET MOSCOW PROBABLY EXPECTED MORE FROM THE SHOCK OF HANOI'S VICTORY, AND THE LOSS OF PRESTIGE FOR THE U.S. IN THE AREA MAY HAVE LED SOVIET ANALYSTS TO SEE THE WHEEL OF HISTORY TURNING THEIR WAY. IF SO, THEY ARE PROBABLY SOMEWHAT DISAPPOINTED THAT THE WHEEL HAS NOT SWUNG MORE IN THEIR DIRECTION THAN HAS ACTUALLY BEEN THE CASE. STOESSEL

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